

# An ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE OF GREAT BRITAIN ON THE PROPRIETY OF ABSTAINING FROM West India Sugar and Rum



Forc'd from home and all its plea-  
Afric's coast! I left forlorn; [sures,  
To increase a stranger's treasures  
O'er the raging billows borne. [me,  
Men from England bought and sold  
Paid my price in paltry gold; [me,  
But though theirs they have enroll'd  
Minds are never to be sold.  
Still in thought as free as ever,  
What are England's rights, I ask,  
Me from my delights to sever,  
Me to torture, me to task?  
Fleecy locks and black complexion  
Cannot forfeit Nature's claim;  
Skins may differ, but affection  
Dwells in white and black the same.  
Why did all-creating Nature,  
Make the plant for which we toil!  
Sighs must fan it, tears must water,  
Sweat of ours must dress the soil.  
Think, ye Masters, iron-hearted,  
Lolling at your jovial boards, ed,  
Think how many backs have smart-  
For the sweets your cane affords.  
Is there, as ye sometimes tell us—  
Is there one who reigns on high?  
Has he bid you buy and sell us,  
Speaking from his throne the sky?  
Ask him, if your knotted scourges,  
Fetters, blood-extorting screws,

Are the means which duty urges,  
Agents of his will to use?  
Hark! he answers.—Wild tornadoes,  
Strewing yonder shores with wrecks,  
Wasting towns, plantations, mea-  
dows,  
Are the voice with which he speaks.  
He foreseeing what vexation  
Afric's sons would undergo,  
Fix'd their tyrant's habitation  
Where his whirlwind answers—No!  
By our blood in Afric wasted  
Ere our necks receiv'd the chain—  
By the mis'ries which we tasted  
Crossing in your barks the main—  
By our sufferings since ye brought us  
To the man-degrading mart,  
All sustain'd with patience taught  
Only by a broken heart— [us  
Deem our nations brutes no longer  
Till some reason you shall find  
Worthier of regard, and stronger  
Than the colour of our kind.  
Slaves to gold, whose sordid dealings  
Tarnish all your boasted pow'rs,  
Prove that ye have human feelings  
Ere ye proudly question ours.  
Cowper's Negro's Complaint.

The Twenty-fourth Edition.

London, Sold by M. Gurney, No. 128, Holborn-Hill. price  
a Halfpenny, 13 for 6d, or 50 for 1s 9d. Of whom may be  
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NOTwithstanding the late determination of the House of Commons on the Slave-Trade, we may hope the discussion it has received will not be useless; and that the public attention has not been excited in vain, to a system of cruelty which it is painful even to recite. It may be hoped that, claiming for ourselves the most perfect freedom, we shall no longer impose upon others a slavery the most oppressive; and that, enjoying a degree of felicity unequalled in any age or country, we shall no longer range the world to increase the misery of mankind.

The lust of power, and the pride of conquest, have doubtless produced instances far too numerous, of man enslaved by man. But we, in an enlightened age, have greatly surpassed, in injustice, the most barbarous ages: and while we are pretending to the finest feelings of humanity, are exercising unprecedented cruelty. We have planted slavery in the rank soil of sordid avarice; the produce has been misery in the extreme. We have ascertained, by a course of experiments in cruelty, the least portion of nourishment requisite to enable man to linger a few years in misery; the greatest quantity of labour which, in such a situation, the extreme of punishment can extort; and the utmost degree of pain, labour, and hunger united, that the human frame can endure.

In vain have such scenes been developed. The wealth derived from the horrid traffic, has created an influence that secures its continuance; unless the people refuse to receive the produce of robbery and murder. For the legislature having refused to interpose, it devolves on the people, either to reprobate or approve the measure. West-India slavery depends upon them for its existence, as it is in the power of every individual to increase or to diminish its extent. The laws of our country may indeed prohibit us the sugar-cane, unless we will receive it through the medium of slavery. They may hold it to our lips, steeped in the blood of our fellow-creatures; but they cannot compel us to accept the loathsome potion. With us it rests, either to receive it and be partners in the crime, or to exonerate ourselves from guilt, by spurning from us the temptation. For the crime rests not alone with those who conduct the traffic, or the legislature by which it is protected. If we purchase the commodity, we participate in the crime. The slave-dealer, the slave-holder, and the slave-driver, are virtually the agents of the consumer, and may be considered as employed and hired by him to procure the commodity. For, by holding out the temptation, he is the first mover in the horrid process; and every distinction is done away by the moral maxim, That whatever we do by another, we do ourselves.

Nor are we by any means warranted to consider our share in producing these evils in a trivial point of view. The consumption of sugar in tea, wines, pastry, and punch, in this country, is so considerable, that by abstaining, we shall have an important effect on the Slave Trade, the colonial slavery, and on the other European markets, where the consumption of sugar is but small, because the above articles, which occasion its consumption in



this country, are on the continent very little used. [3

Dreadful consideration, that our increasing prosperity has spread desolation over a country as large as all Europe! For it is on British luxury, the African Slave Trade depends for support: they have increased, and they would fall together. For though Jamaica supplies more sugar than all our West-India islands did at any period prior to 1755, yet, until the disturbances in the French islands, within these few years, sugars have ever sold in British markets 20 or 30, sometimes 50 *per cent.* dearer than in other parts of the world. And it is not to support the old plantations, as is pretended, but chiefly to form new ones, for the supply of this our increasing luxury, that the wretched Africans are torn from their native land.

Let us then imagine our immense consumption wholly, or in great part to cease, and our sugars to be thrown on the foreign markets; would additional slaves be wanted to supply an overflowing market at a falling price? No! the African Slave Trade, by whomsoever conducted, to supply sugar colonies, by whatever nation possessed, must totally cease. Horror and dismay would give place to peace and civilization, through a coast of above three thousand miles extent, and above a thousand miles inland: for so extensive are our depredations, and so extensive are the benefits which it is in our power to confer. Nor would the beneficial effects cease, even here. The West-India islands, finding less demand for sugar, must appropriate less ground to the sugar-cane, and leave more for provisions: the slaves would be less worked, better fed, and in a few years consist intirely of native Creoles. Or if the planters appropriate the land to the other productions of the islands, the same beneficial effects must ensue. For Mr. Cooke tells us, "*the cultivation of cotton, piment, to, and coffee, is easier than sugar; the slaves look better, and increase faster:*" and instead of requiring additional slaves, they would be able to increase their plantations with those already in the islands. For Governor Parry says, "*one acre of sugar requires as much labour as three of cotton.*" Thus our refraining from the consumption, even for a few years, would destroy the Slave Trade, bring fresh land into culture, and increase the Creoles.

The diminution of the consumption would by sinking the price of the commodity; take away the temptation to import additional slaves. Now as a fall in the price would obstruct the Slave Trade, and meliorate the condition of the slaves; so a rise will produce effects the most baneful. The planter, tempted to get sugar and rum to market while that high price continues, will deprive his slaves of their provision grounds, to plant with canes; and force them to the most extreme exertions. The *murder*, or, in the technical language of the West Indies, the *loss* of his slaves, will be of little consideration. The large crop, and the high price, will amply compensate him. The question therefore now is, not merely whether we shall hold out to him an inducement to purchase additional slaves; but, also tempt him to

4 ]murder those he already has? West India packets have doubtless already borne the murderous dispatches, expressed in language too dreadfully explicit. "*The price of sugar and rum still continues high. You must adopt every mode to forward as large a cargo as possible. A fortunate crisis now offers itself for extricating my estate from the difficulties in which it is involved. We must avail ourselves of it; another may never occur. Consequences though disagreeable, must at the present moment be overlooked. The slave market is still open for a supply. New-fangled humanity is no more.*" The day hardly dawns when the whip resounds through those regions of horror; nor ceases, till darkness closes the scene, which day after day is renewed. The miserable victims, destitute of every comfort: sinking under the three endemic diseases of our islands, hunger, torture, and extreme labour; and urged to exertions they are unable to sustain, expire beneath the lash, which in vain endeavours to rouse them to a renewal of their labour.

If such be the dreadful situation of the West-India slaves, may it not be asked, On what principle we can receive that produce which occasions it? For as neither the slave-dealer, nor the planter, can have any moral right to the person of him they stile their slave, to his labour, or the produce of it: so they can convey no right in that produce to us. Whatever number of hands either the slave or the produce may pass through, if the criminal circumstances be known at the time of the transfer, the possessor can have only a criminal possession: and the money paid, either for the slave, or for the produce of his labour, being paid to obtain that criminal possession; can confer no moral right whatever. So, if the death of the person called a slave, be occasioned by the criminal possession, the criminal possessor is guilty of murder: and we, who have occasioned his being in that situation, are accessaries to the murder; as, by receiving the produce of his labour, we are accessaries to the robbery.

If we, as individuals concerned (either by procuring or holding the slaves, or receiving the produce) imagine that our share is so minute that it cannot perceptibly increase the injury; let us recollect that, though numbers partaking in a crime may diminish the shame, they cannot diminish its turpitude. Is it possible, that an enormous injury can take place, and the criminality be destroyed merely by the criminals becoming numerous? Were an hundred assassins to plunge their daggers into their victim, though each might plead, that without his assistance the crime would have been compleated, and that his poinard neither occasioned nor accelerated the murder, yet each would be guilty. For into how many parts soever a criminal action be divided, the crime itself rests intire on every perpetrator.

But even supposing for a moment, that the evil had an existence from causes totally independent of us: yet are we to bind up no wounds but those we have inflicted, nor relieve any distress but what we have occasioned: if dreadful misery exists, which it is in our power jointly with others, to remedy; it is doubtless

our duty to contribute our share; and to act from consci- [5  
ence, as we should in similar cases from feeling and inclination.

For instance: Let us suppose the Algerines to establish sugar plantations, and resort to the banks of the Thames for slaves. Suppose our wives, our husbands, our children, our parents, our brethren, swept away, and the fruit of their labour, produced with agonizing hearts and trembling limbs, landed at the port of London. What would be our conduct? Should we say, "Sugar is a necessary of life: I cannot do without it. Besides the quantity I use is but small: and though it be very criminal in the Algerines to enslave others, I am not bound to look to the nature or consequence of the transaction. Paying for the sugar, I have a right to consume it, however it may have been obtained." If such would be our language in that case, be it so on the present occasion. For let us recollect that in both cases the enslaved are our brethren.

And let us only suppose an Englishman were to receive injuries, that bore but the slightest resemblance to those daily committed in our islands, the nation would be inflamed with resentment, and clamorous to avenge the injury. And can our pride suggest, that the rights of men are limited to any nation, or to any colour? Were any one to treat a fellow creature in this country as we do the unhappy Africans in the West-Indies; struck with horror, we should be zealous to deliver the oppressed, and punish the oppressor. Are then the offices of humanity and functions of justice to be circumscribed by geographical boundaries? Can reason, can conscience justify this contrast in our conduct, between our promptitude, in the one case, and our torpor in the other?—Mr. Addison justly observes, that "humanity to become estimable must be combined with justice." But we seem to act as if we thought, that the relief of our fellow creatures, and protection from injuries, were works of supererogation; to be granted or withheld, as caprice, or inclination may suggest.

After the important considerations adduced, it might be reckoned a degradation of the subject to mention the national dignity; or even that might induce us to counteract a powerful body of men, who are trampling under foot, the dictates of humanity, and the interest of the nation: men, who have received for sugar alone, above a million *per ann.* more than it would have cost at other markets. From Mr. Botham's evidence it appears, that in Batavia, where labour is as high as in England, sugar equal to the best West-India, is sold at 1d  $\frac{1}{2}$  per pound. These are the men who are calling on us to aid the operation of their whips by the terrors of our bayonets; and to misapply the public treasure to support individuals in violating every principle of law and justice, and to defend them in the most dreadful tyranny over half a million of persons, born in islands, which, when it serves their purpose they pretend to be *ours*; but of which they have virtually usurped the sovereignty: and have the audacity to tell the British legislature, "That they cannot abolish the slave trade; for that if England refuses to furnish them with slaves,



6.] they will obtain a supply through other channels," These nominal colonies have, it seems, been taught, that we have no right to control them; that the acts of their Assemblies alone are obligatory; and that those of British legislators, are binding only on those whom they represent. For the right of enslaving others, they contend, as the most valuable of their privileges.

Thus it appears, that the legislature is not only unwilling, but perhaps unable to grant redress; and therefore it is more peculiarly incumbent upon us. *To abstain from the use of sugar and rum, until our West-India Planters themselves have prohibited the importation of additional slaves, and commenced as speedy and effectual a subversion of slavery in their islands, as the circumstances and situation of the slaves will admit: or till we can obtain the produce of the sugar cane in some other mode, UNCONNECTED WITH SLAVERY, AND UNPOLLUTED WITH BLOOD.*

For, surely, it may be hoped that we shall not limit our views merely to the abolition of the African slave trade, seeing the colonial slavery formed upon it, is in its principle equally unjust. Can it be more iniquitous to force the Africans from their native land, than to retain them and their posterity in perpetual bondage. The African slave trade maybe the most prominent feature; yet it is but a feature: and were it abolished, the West-India slavery would still exist. But shall we suffer half a million of fellow subjects, to be held in slavery for ever? I say, *fellow subjects*. For undoubtedly, every person born in the dominions of Great Britain is a subject, bound to obey and entitled to the protection of the common law of England; and in opposition to which, acts of assemblies, derived from the crown, can be of no authority.

In demanding liberty then, for the persons called *slaves* in our islands, we demand no more than they are intitled to by the common law of the land. The most eligible mode of putting them in possession of their legal and natural right, may be a question of difficulty; but it is one that ought to be considered with no view but to their happiness. The plan to be adopted, ought to be certain and speedy in its operation; tho' it should militate against the supposed, or even real interest, of their oppressors; and let it be remembered, that it is in the power of the people of England to effect it, by refusing to receive the produce. Nor would the legislature be then harrassed with preposterous claims for compensation; which, however unfounded in justice or reason, will be supported by influence, and enforced with clamour.

The case now fully lies before us; and we have to make our choice, either to join ourselves with these manufacturers of human woe, or to renounce the horrid association. If we adopt the former, let us at least have the candour to avow our conduct in its real deformity. Let us no longer affect to deplore the calamities attendant on the Slave Trade, of which we are the primary cause: nor execrate the conduct of the slave-dealer, the slaveholder, or the slave-driver; when they are only our partners in guilt. For if we now take *our share* in the transaction, we should,

were we placed in a similar situation with them, with as little compunction take *theirs*; unless we can suppose that we should become virtuous, in proportion as the temptation to vice increased. For we should not then, any more than now, be destitute of subterfuges to destroy the feelings of our minds, and the convictions of our consciences.

No longer can ignorance and inattention be pleaded as our excuse. The subject has been four years before the public. Its dreadful wickedness has been fully proved. Every deception with which it has been disguised, has been completely done away; it stands before us in all its native horrors. No longer can it be pretended, that Africa is a barbarous, uncultivated land, inhabited by a race of savages. Mr. How, who went up the country, deposes, That, inland, it is every where well cultivated, abounding with rice: millet, potatoes, cotton and indigo plantations; that the inhabitants are quick in learning languages, remarkably industrious, hospitable and obliging. That they possess noble and heroic minds, disdaining slavery, and frequently seeking refuge from it in death. Nor shall we again be told; of the superior happiness they enjoy under the benevolent care of the planters; Mr. Coor having deposed, that, "setting slaves to work in a morning, is attended with loud peals of "whipping;"—General Tottenham, "that there is no comparison between regimental flogging, which only cuts the skin, "and the plantation, which cuts out the flesh;"—Capt. Hall, "that the punishments are very shocking, much more so than in "men of war;"—Capt. Smith, "that at every stroke of the "whip a piece of flesh is cut out,"—and Mr. Ross, "that he "considers a comparison between West-India slaves, and the "British peasantry, as an insult to common sense."

We are now called to redress evils, in comparison with which, all that exist in this nation sink beneath our notice; and the only sacrifice we are required to make, is the abandoning a luxury which habit only can have rendered important—a luxury for which the industrious bee labours to supply an excellent succedaneum. If we refuse to hear the admonitions of conscience on this occasion, it may be justly inferred, that our numerous displays of humanity, have not their foundation in any virtuous or valuable principle: but that they owe their origin to custom and ostentation? If our execration of the slave trade be any more than hypocritical declamation against crimes we are not in a situation to commit, we shall, instead of being solicitous to find despicable distinctions to justify our conduct, abhor the idea of contributing in the least degree, to such scenes of misery.

If these be deductions from the most obvious principles of reason, of justice and of humanity; what must be the result if we extend our views to religious considerations? Will it be said we assume a religious profession to diminish the extent of our moral duties, or to weaken the force of our obligation to observe them.

May we not then ask, if we mean to insult the God we pre-

8. I tend to worship, by supplicating him to "have mercy upon all prisoners and captives," and to "defend the fatherless, widows, and children, and all that are desolate and oppressed." And may we not expect that the Dissenters, will think it at least as requisite to dissent from the national *crimes*, as the national *religion*; unless they mean to prove they have consciences of so peculiar a texture, as to take offence at the *religion* of their country, while they can conform without scruple to its most *criminal practices*. If indeed they are satisfied, after an impartial examination, that the traffic alluded to is fair and honest, it will become them to encourage it; they will reprobate this work as an attempt to slander honest men, and to injure their property, by holding it out to the public, as the produce of robbery and murder. But if the arguments be valid, surely they will not continue to treat the subject with cool indifference.

But there is one class of dissenters who justly stand high in the public estimation, for their steady, manly, and uniform opposition to our colonial slavery. Can it then be supposed that, after having awakened the public attention, they can refuse to contribute what is in their own power to remedy the evil? The plan proposed, is a plain and obvious deduction from their uniform principle of having no concern in what they disapprove. Thus, viewing war as unlawful, they consider goods obtained through that medium as criminally obtained: and will not suffer any of their members to purchase prize-goods: and surely they will not pretend the seizing a man's person, is a crime inferior to the seizing of his goods.

But however obvious a duty may be, yet the mind when hardened by habit, admits with difficulty the conviction of guilt: and when sanctioned by common practice, we frequently commit the grossest crimes without remorse. It is therefore peculiarly incumbent on us in such situations, to examine our conduct with the utmost suspicion, and to fortify our minds with moral principles and the sanctions of religion. In proportion as we are under their influence, we shall rejoice that it is in our power to diminish those evils, recollecting that it rests not with the exertions of wealth, of rank, or of power: for even in the peaceful hamlet, and sequestered cot, we find the source of Africa's wrongs, and to them we look for their redress. Surely then we may look with hope, that the standard of the oppressed being raised, the wise and the good will form a phalanx round it, that shall make the abettors of oppression tremble. Let us therefore exert ourselves to the utmost in our respective situations, to rescue from oppression and misery the injured Africans and their unhappy offspring in our islands: considering that our exertions are not to be judged of merely by their immediate effects, for they may produce remote ones of which we can form no estimate; but, whatever they may be, after having done our duty, we may leave them with HIM who governs all things after the counsel of his own will. F I N I S.



